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Time-extended groups provide the following: (1) they ease the need to get things started immediately, (2) they provide the opportunity for interaction to be carried to its natural end-point, (3) they allow a greater range of techniques to be experienced by members, (4) they increase the chances for therapeutic contact, (5) they allow participants to experience a wider range of personal experimentation, and (6) they can include a larger number of participants. Useful techniques for use with time-extended groups are described. Both verbal and non-verbal techniques are included. Suggested time sequences are discussed. Two to three hour groups, five to eight hour groups, twelve to eighteen hour groups or twenty-four hour groups are felt to be desirable. Undesirable behavior can be decreased by: (1) obtaining the medical and physical history of each member, (2) discouraging borderline psychotics from participating, (3) establishing rules, (4) keeping membership below 20, and (5) having co-counselor training and participation. Assessment of gains or losses by members can be made using an autobiography, self-rating scales, or sociometry. (EK)

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TIME-EXTENDED MULTIPLE GROUP COUNSELING

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by

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TIME EXTENDED MULTIPLE GROUP COUNSELING

Marathons, Encounter Groups, Extended Week Ends, All-Day Workshops, and Time-Extended Groups have been receiving continued attention for the past several years. Interest in these types of groups seems to be growing in strength and numbers as witnessed by numerous articles in professional and lay literature. Impetus for groups of this nature has evolved from varied directions and appears to be increasing.

After experiencing and conducting groups of this nature, I feel that a rationale can be developed to offer support for inclusion of groups of this nature in counseling programs. Extended-time groups can offer solutions for certain problems which appear in traditional type groups. I would agree, however, that the time-extended group does not offer a panacea for all difficulties which exist in traditional Time-Limited groups.

One of the difficulties which I feel the extended-time group can help dissipate is an easing of the need to get things started immediately and thereby cutting off the warm-up period. Often, the warm-up periods last most of the time set for the limit of the traditional group. It is true that the counselor can act in a way to speed up the getting-acquainted process, but often a natural process is more advantageous to the group. Any worries a counselor may have about the warm-up period interfering with the group can be solved by simply extending the time to lessen any significant interference of this naturally occurring group dynamic.

An extended-time group provides the opportunity for interaction in the group to be carried to its natural end-point. This means that interchanges can be carried to their logical, illogical, or alogical end. A traditional group does not always provide the opportunity for participants to resolve feelings which arise between each other during the group, nor does it permit expression of emotions which quite often take longer than traditional groups have time for. The time-extended group affords an opportunity for a participant to "get it out", and to "get it over with".

The time-extended group allows a greater range of techniques to be experienced by the group members. Often in traditional groups, techniques which may take too much time are prohibitive. Along these lines, special values for co-counselors are available such as varied roles of antagonist

and protagonist, psychodramatic roles, more group involvement, etc.

With the time-extension, the chances for therapeutic contact are enhanced. Through time, defense mechanisms tend to be utilized less and thus the chance for "getting through" to a counselee is increased. This point is often criticized as being somewhat inhumane, and possibly responsible for behavior which is atypical for some participants. Although the possibility for regressive, atypical, or psychotic type behavior to emerge is present, it can be handled by a trained counselor in the group. To decrease the probability of this type of behavior occurring, proper screening is important, along with safeguards discussed in this paper. Those people who do deteriorate or regress in their behavior can be helped back to a reality state often in a greatly benefited condition by the allotment of sufficient time during the group.

During the time-extended group, participants can experience a wide range of personal experimentation which is not available in more traditional groups. Participants can try out different roles and behavior, and get immediate feedback as to the appropriateness of their new roles. The extended time also allows for more individual problems to be resolved during one encounter. To generalize some, I would say there exists less of a tendency for discussions to be topical and non-therapeutic in time-extended groups. Certainly this aspect is a function of the counselor's intervention during the group, but there is a tendency for time-extension to allow for more therapeutic impact and growth.

A final point which I feel adds support for the use of extension techniques is that a larger number of participants can be included in the group. This point is important to consider if you are working in a setting in which you would like to maximize your therapeutic contact with your counselees. As with anything, this technique can be over used and become quite tiresome to the counselor. It would be quite difficult to conduct more than two time-extended groups during one month if the longer time-extension periods were used.

The preceding paragraphs describe what I believe are points which give credence to the use of time-extended groups as part of counseling programs. All points, of course, are based on the assumption that group

counseling does provide therapeutic movement for counselees.

II. TECHNIQUES

In this next section, I will discuss some techniques which I have found profitable in time-extended groups. The techniques in this section are those which I feel are not used frequently in traditional groups mainly because of the time factor, and the primary focus of the traditional group. Depending on the philosophy of the counselor and techniques he feels competent with, the techniques described in this section can be included in his repertoire.

Included in a list of verbal techniques are the following which seem to be particularly useful in time-extended groups. I have found the full range of psychodramatic techniques valuable aids in the extended group. Techniques such as role-reversal, alter ego, doubling, soliloquy, etc., have been extremely useful. It is important in using any technique to make it appropriate to the conflict being experienced by the client.

Confrontations and encounters with group members and counselors are quite useful in the group. It is often helpful to use other group members as observers to determine if confrontations are on the level or whether group members are playing games with each other. Usually there is group peer pressure to be honest with any interaction among group members. Observers or advisors are used to give feedback to members who are having the confrontations,

The group and individual fantasy is a valuable technique for use in the extended group. Dr. Shutz has an excellent description of this technique in his book, Joy. This technique requires more time than is usually available to most traditional groups. The several different forms this technique can take all seem equally effective when used in the appropriate situation. Often this technique is quite dramatic, and therefore, I do not recommend the use of the technique without experiencing it or observing its use several times. For clients who have difficulty letting go in the real world, this technique may be used with surprising results. Again, feedback from group members after the experience may be quite helpful to the client.

As discussed in the first section of this paper, group participants are allowed to experiment more in the time-extended group. One technique which sets up experimentation is the creation of safe emergencies. In this technique, the client tries out new behavior which can be somewhat threatening with the hoped for outcome that the threat is lessened. As a counselor experiences and conducts groups of this nature, he will learn many techniques which just seem to fit the situation. If the counselor maintains an open, free, creative, and innovative environment in the group, usually techniques will be developed to fit the situations as they arise.

The preceding discussion has been limited to verbal techniques, except for the moving about which is a required and an essential part of some psychodramatic techniques. There are numerous non-verbal techniques which have been discussed in much of the professional literature lately. Often non-verbal techniques are used to call attention to communication between people which is usually ignored. Using a physical non-verbal technique to express an emotional situation is a quite helpful technique. Descriptions of non-verbal techniques are available in books by Dr. William Schutz, Dr. Frederick Perls, and Bernard Gunther.

Non-verbal techniques are used to help a person with awareness of senses which he seldom uses, to express emotional feeling through the body, to confront people physically, and to communicate. To many counselors, non-verbal techniques may look like fun and games at first. These techniques do, however, provide a powerful addition to counseling techniques which counselors should become more aware of and feel free to utilize in their practices.

Non-verbal techniques have been available for use by counselors for some time now, but seemingly have only recently come to the forefront. I would recommend that those counselors who have not utilized these powerful techniques become aware of their potential and put them to profitable use. As with any learning, it would be most beneficial to witness and experience the non-verbal techniques before using them.

III. SUGGESTED TIME SEQUENCES

Any look at group counseling literature will show that many different time sequences have been suggested by different counselors. I feel that there are certain time sequences which lend themselves more favorably to multiple time-extended groups than traditional time limits. As you may be becoming aware, I have a prejudice towards the multiple time-extended group. The time limits suggested here can be varied to suit your particular situation.

I feel that groups which meet for an hour or an hour and a half are in many instances unsatisfactory for counseling purposes. The shorter time group simply does not allow sufficient time for many of the therapeutic tools the counselor has to enhance his effectiveness. If we cut off and eliminate some of the tools of any worker, we automatically cut down the effectiveness and possibly the quality of his work. With this point in mind, I contend that lenghtening the time of a group also expands the number of tools which can be utilized and enhances group productivity of the counselors and counselees.

One group which I feel can produce results if met with regularly as a traditional group is a two to three hour group. This time limit does not usually put an undue strain on the counselors when met on a regular basis, and allows sufficient time for many of the extended-time techniques. In this group warm-up and closure are less of a problem and tend to occur naturally, in most instances, and participants have enough time to be themselves. During the longer time period, more group members can be attended to and more extensive resolution of individual conflicts can be attempted. I would suggest this type of group for those settings which find more lengthy groups impractical or unwieldly. This type of group can give both the counselors and the clients an experience in the use of different techniques which could possibly be more effective.

A second group which I have found useful is a five to eight hour group which can have open or closed membership. This type of a group provides sufficient time in which to use most any of the techniques the counselors deem appropriate. Warm-up and closure are no problems, and

the intensity of the group approaches that of a lengthy marathon. In this type of group members can work at their own pace and counselors can feel free to experiment with new techniques. This group provides the atmosphere for the full range of marathon dynamics without the fatigue factor. For those who are concerned about causing inappropriate behavior to emerge, this group would provide more of a safety factor, because fatigue does not enter. I have found this type of a group to be a valuable follow-up for a longer marathon. As with many other groups, once participants learn the routine, the work becomes easier with fewer problems getting started. A more casual atmosphere usually pervades this type of group and the pace is relaxed. This group can also provide an excellent introduction to a longer marathon group.

A third group which I feel is a helpful experience is a lengthy group which meets for sufficient time to begin to cause some fatigue in group members. This type of group commonly meets for twenty-four hours or more, although there have been some attempts at mini-marathons of from twelve to eighteen hours.

The marathon maximizes interpersonal encounters during the group and enhances the prospect of dramatic change occurring through therapeutic contact. The lengthy time gives sufficient range for all types of participants to "get something". Of course, through time, defenses can be dramatically diffused, resulting in the awakening and revitalizing of seldom-used emotions. This type of experience heightens sensitivity by involvement in the therapeutic process both as spectator and participant.

Counselors can enjoy the greatest latitude of techniques and the opportunity to become both client and counselor. Involvement in the group as an active participant can be quite rewarding for the counselor.

IV. SAFEGUARDS FOR TIME-EXTENDED COUNSELING

To some individuals, the use of time-extended counseling is somewhat threatening because of the fear of inducing some type of behavior due to the weariness and fatigue factors imposed by the lengthened time.

This, of course, is primarily a dynamic which may happen in the longer marathon group. Included in this section are rules and procedures which may be followed to decrease the probability of undesired behavior occurring.

I feel that information on the medical and physical history of each group participant is helpful in screening prospective counselees. Because of the distinctly physical nature of the non-verbal techniques, any potential problem in this area should be noted and the client prevented from participation in a potentially harmful encounter. Clients under medication should be noted as to type and reason for the prescription. It is helpful if a physician is available and optimumly a psychiatrist as a co-counselor for longer time groups.

Those clients who have psychotic tendencies or are borderline psychotic should be discouraged from participation or carefully guided through the experience. If the counselor is too concerned about any client, he should avoid placing the client in the group. Any unusual psychological reactions should be noted before clients are allowed to participate. Anxiety-reactions, overt hostility and aggression, flight, etc, are useful information in heading off potential problems during the group.

For added protection, certain rules should be established during the group. Some simple rules which I have found helpful are --- no one can leave during the group, no physical harm or damage can be caused, no drugs or alcohol are allowed. Other rules can be added depending on your situation, keeping in mind that too many rules restrict the group.

As far as group size and setting is concerned, I feel that more than twenty participants can become quite unwieldly and difficult to attend to. If a smaller group is desirable to some counselors, it should be noted that quite often the interaction during the group is a function of the size and that larger numbers may be more suited to longer times and smaller numbers to less time as in the mini-marathon. It is helpful to have additional group rooms available for subgroup works. Essential is at least one bathroom. A casual-type atmosphere pervades and it is wise to have enough throw pillows and lounging type furniture available.

Food should be catered and snacks should be made available.

Co-counselor training and preparation is essential for time-extended groups. Participation in time-extended groups as a member is vital before any counselor should consider conducting a group of this nature. After participation as a member, the counselor should engage himself as a co-counselor with a counselor who is experienced in time-extended groups. A complete knowledge of group dynamics and techniques is required before conducting time-extended groups. I believe it is beneficial to both the group and the counselors to have a degree of familiarity between co-counselors. If the co-counselors know what to expect from each other, there is less conflict as to procedures during the group.

V. EXPECTED OUTCOMES, GAINS AND LOSSES ASSESSMENT

As with other groups, the most obvious gain for the clients is a better outlook on self and the world. The time-extended group provides an opportunity for meaningful involvement on an intense basis. The group allows meaningful relationships to be formed with other group members and provides for many therapeutic encounters. Group members can experience real contacts with real people who have come together to seek real experiences with depth and meaning. Through various encounters, participants can become themselves and discover their relationship to and effect on others in the group. Heightened awareness and sensitivity to environment with increased thinking and feeling are often valuable outcomes for participants. The extended time provides an opportunity for clients to finish with a problem area and to try out new behaivor in rewarding, creative ways. In most cases, there is an expression of genuine positive regard between some participants and counselors during the group.

The time-extended group provides certain benefits to the co-counselors aside from those which may be similar to the participants. The group provides a valuable experience of involvement for counselors which allows for understanding of personal strengths, weaknesses, and abilities. The counselors can become more aware of the value of the group to help, and counselors often gain a deeper respect for the ability of the human being

to resolve his own difficulties and conflicts. The group provides a valuable in-service function in that it increases the counselors' facility with various techniques, and can increase his tolerance for the ambiguity in human expression. Also, counselors gain skill in working with other professionals in a dynamic, creative relationship.

Gains and losses assessment in groups can be a topic all of its own, but I would like to make a few comments on some possible procedures for use in the time-extended group. This area is currently neglected in the area of time-extended research. I feel that any measurement device should be related to each individual in the group. Since any group is heterogenous as far as emotional conflicts and difficulties are concerned, any measurement should be related to the person's concept of his own difficulty. Since the human has to cope with his own difficulties, he should be able to judge his own degree of coping with behavior.

The autobiography seems to lend itself to this type of measurement, but it is difficult to quantify objectively. This approach does allow clients complete freedom of expression of their reactions to the group. Asking for several accounts during the group would allow a progression of involvement to be plotted. I believe this approach to hold some merit and to be worthwhile considering in future research.

Self-rating scales and various adjective check lists may provide a valuable tool for the researcher. If clients are allowed to rate themselves on scales which they choose as being related to them, an optimum type of individual evaluation can be attempted. Certain statistical problems would arise with this technique, but I am sure they can be overcome.

A final area which I think may merit some investigation is sociometry. This technique would, in a sense, provide an outside source of validation for self-rating scales. Concurrence on the two scales may mean the counselee and the group see each other as the same, and if favorable adjectives are selected, it may also mean a better degree of emotional health.

At this point, these areas are suggestions for study. Some may

prove valuable, some may not. This paper is written with the hope it will provoke some thought in the area of time-extended counseling. I feel that time-extended groups add a valuable resource to counseling procedures which has been neglected all too long.

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